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Idiosyncrasies

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Duty. It was the watchword for Cularin's heroes long before the Clone Wars. When their world, their lives, and their loved ones were threatened, the brave men and women of the Cularin system have selflessly acted to save all they hold dear. It was duty that drove them to establish their own militia against the tyranny of a corrupt military force many times their own number. It was duty that brought them time and time again into conflict with the twisted minions of the dark side of the Force when naught else could withstand their evil.

The children of Cularin know well the call of duty and the terrible price it often exacts...

Warlan Tosk was having a bad day. There were irritating days, there were annoying days, and then there were bad days. This definitely shot way past the first two and was far exceeding the third. It was almost its own category. If he were the kind to use harsh language, Warlan could have said exactly what kind of day he was having, but barring a string of invectives that would have set fire to the surroundings, "bad day" would simply have to suffice.

He held up the security datapad one more time, desperate to achieve some form of communication with the clerk in front of him. "Do you see this?" He pointed at a graphic near the bottom of the screen. "Do you know what this is?"

The ambivalent-looking Human woman made a decent show of pretending to care as she looked at the screen for the hundredth time. She knew that if she didn't answer this man's questions, he was likely never going away. "Yes, sir. It's a Republic Senate Seal."

"Correct." Warlan was guardedly optimistic now. At least she was acknowledging obvious facts. Now to try for something just a little bit harder. "And do you know what it means?"

She looked up into the bothersome man's eyes. He was handsome in a harried way, not too muscular but athletic in build. With his dark brown hair and bright green eyes, he was exactly the kind of man she'd normally date a few times and then never get called by again. Men like him always broke her heart, and if this particular version of that walking pain thought he was going to get anywhere with her, he was sadly mistaken. Yes, it was petty revenge, but it was her petty revenge.

"No, sir."

He almost screamed. "You work for the Senate! You are an administrator at a Republic Holding Facility! How can you not know that this seal is a legal authorization for the document upon which it appears?!" And then he breathed, rather hard, as that had all been one long exhalation.

"Well, I do now. Thank you." She found it fun to watch him twist in the wind. Oh, she knew his type - - loud, bossy, gorgeous... It was definitely time to wiggle the knife now. "But this is not a holding facility. It's a protected safehouse for Senators and other governmental - - "

"Yes, it IS a holding center!" Warlan screamed in frustration, but only a little, and much to her delight. Then he tried to calm down; losing his professionalism was not going to do Ms. Wren any good. "Look, just because it has Durosian marble columns out front and an indoor Toorgash range with real grass and live Toorgas doesn't make it any less a jail."

She shrugged. She'd made him lose his temper, and no matter how attractive it made him look, she was sticking to her blasters. "I don't wish to disagree with you, sir, but we are listed in the Republic charter as a - - "

"You could be listed as a Kilassin petting zoo, but that doesn't change what this place really is!" He could see where this was going - - again. Time to change tactics. "Tell me this, then. Is my client free to leave?"

She looked at him, eyes impassive and unforgiving. This one should send him right over the edge, she hoped. "And who is your client?"

To her glee, his face turned the same crimson color as the Supreme Chancellor's guards' new uniforms. Amazingly, he managed to sputter out her name. "Senator... Lavina... Durada-Vashne... Wren."

She knew what to say next. But was she really that evil? Yes, she decided. This one was just too good-looking and too much fun to play with. Besides, it wasn't evil, she corrected herself. It was revenge. Not against this one, per se, but against the horde of ex-boyfriends who'd ruined her credit, forgotten her birthdays and treated her like... like... well, like she was treating this poor, obviously defenseless man now.

"And just how do you spell Wren?"

Inside Warlan Tosk, personal security specialist, something snapped. He stopped talking, stood completely upright, smoothed down the lapels of his jacket and smiled thinly. "Will you excuse me? I'll be right back, ma'am." And with that, he slowly walked out of the lobby and into the building's lavish green courtyard, a half-deranged look in his eyes.

She watched him leave with a self-satisfied grin. That was more fun than she'd had in ever so long. What she needed now was another man to break; why stop when you're on a roll? And, as if the universe itself was hers to command, a brawny Zabrak carrying a package from Renna's Transport Service came through the front doors a few moments after Warlan left.

With a silent "thank you" to whatever powers were obviously watching over her, she buzzed him through the security doors and back into the office. This

one, maybe she'd flirt with first. It would make torturing him all the more fun.

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Outside, Warlan paced between the manicured hedges. Could he have been wrong? He'd been here more than an hour now, and aside from a rancor disguised as a receptionist, he saw nothing dangerous. Maybe Wren was all right after all. Perhaps this move by the Supreme Chancellor really was to get her out of harm's way while things in the Senate heated up. Was he just being paranoid?

No - - it was his job to be paranoid. All the signs led up to an attempt on Lavina's life. There was that ugly business with the infiltrator on Cularin last year and then the ship hijacking on their way here to Coruscant. The "accident" in Wren's apartment complex had obviously been a staged event as well. He knew what faulty wiring looked like, and that lift had definitely been tampered with. He'd developed a sixth sense about ambushes and assassinations; it was practically screaming at him now.

And every trail he'd followed led him here. His contact in the Undercity going missing while investigating Senators. The strange shipments coming through customs before disappearing out of quarantine. Everything was pointing to something violent about to happen and what was worse, it was about to happen to his client.

He was glad he'd insisted on escorting her here a few days ago when the order came down from the Chancellor to have her moved to this safehouse. He used the term loosely, as it felt a lot more like a prison than a protected shelter. The armed guards, the security gate, and the monitor grid should have made him feel better about the Senator's safety, but somehow it didn't. If trouble couldn't get in, that just meant she couldn't get out to escape it.

Frustrated, Warlan started twirling his blaster pistol. It was a nervous habit, one that helped him settle and focus. In truth, he hardly ever drew it with the intention of shooting. He just liked spinning it around his trigger finger. The last time he'd actually pulled it out of hostility was when he was escorting Lavina here and had to warn that swoop driver away. That driver had been just a little too close for his comfort. Crazy pilot, that one, zipping through traffic, but that was just the way Zabrak were. The whole race seemed allergic to holding still, even stocky ones like...

He turned toward the front doors and shouted into his wrist comm before his brain even registered why. He'd seen that delivery man before, and Warlan Tosk didn't believe in coincidence.

Five yards from the entrance, the doors exploded outward, and the entire front of the facility blossomed into a fireball. The last thing the beleaguered bodyguard saw before unconsciousness dragged him down was the center of the holding facility collapsing, completely engulfed in flames.